The University of Chicago

A CRITIQUE OF THEORIES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1937

By

CHESLEY TAYLOR HOWELL

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to secure a sound philosophical basis for religious living. It is believed that this consists in a theory of value. This belief is founded upon the fact that religious living is a problem of devotion and of conduct. Devotion implies an object worthy of devotion; conduct implies a principle of conduct. These involve a theory of value. The approach to the problem of a religious base should, therefore, be axiological. This is the justification for the present study in value-theory.

The thesis is comprised of two independent pieces of research. Part I is a survey analysis of recent theories of evil; Part II is a critique of recent theories of value. By a process of critical elimination of alternative theories of value, a theory is arrived at which is considered superior, or the most adequate of those examined. The adequacy of the theory is in terms of its implications for experience, existence, and ethics. The concluding chapter is a statement of some of the most significant implications of this value-theory for religious living.

INTERPRETATION OF VALUE-THEORIES

The epistemological classification of value-theories may be summarized in outline form in the following manner:

Subjectivism:

1. Affective (feeling state): Meinong (early view), Hedonists.
2. Volitional (satisfaction of desire): Ehrenfels, Haydon, Ames.
3. Motor-affective (interest): Perry, Prall.

Neutralism:

1. Practical situations conditioned by judgment: Dewey.
2. Subject-object determination (coherence): S. Alexander.

Objectivism:

Non-naturalism:

1. The "Ought."
   (a) Idealists: Sorley, Brightman, Wright.
   (b) Platonists: Moore, Osborne, Clarke, Hartmann.
2. "Objective." Urban.

Naturalism:

1. Objective feeling (aesthetic harmony): Whitehead.
2. Connections between appreciable activities (mutual support): Wieman.

Affective theories of value identify good and evil with feelings of pleasure and pain; volitional theories with the satisfaction of desire; motor-affective theories, as developed by Perry, with interest. As Perry defines it, value denotes any object of any interest, or any interest in any object. This is a generic definition, inclusive of desire. Interest implies awareness of the object of interest and "interest-judgment." Values are graded in terms of intensity, preference (satisfaction), and inclusiveness of interests.[1]

Dewey holds that value is neither subjective nor objective, but "practical," that is, it is conditioned by judgment upon what to do. But Dewey is more concerned with valuing than with value, with a principle of criticism rather than with the nature of value. In consequence his theory is ambiguous, inconsistent, and confusing. At one moment value is an immediate, ultimate, simple, and

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[1] Ralph B. Perry, General Theory of Value (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926).

indefinable quality. At another it seems to be simply liking, or prizing. Again, it denotes what is enjoyable, appraisable. Dewey speaks of judgment as conditioning the existence of value, and of judgment as conditioning the existence of things having the quality of value. He speaks of judgments on values and of judgments on likings as if value and liking were the same, and as if value were prior to judgment. He later says that all that can be said of values "concerns their generative conditions, and the consequences to which they give rise."[1] "Judgments about values are judgments about the conditions and the results of experienced objects. . . . ."[2]

Alexander defines value as coherence between subject and object. Coherence is value because it satisfies, that is, satisfies typical needs and impulses. Tertiary values are objective satisfactions of certain specific wants; non-tertiary values are generic satisfactions of wants.[3] But in each instance the wants are only those that are typical, that promote the type. Tertiary values are special instances of value in general.

According to Whitehead's theory, value denotes the intrinsic reality of an event. Each event is the achieving of an intensity of feeling, and values are graded in accordance with the degree of intensity. This, however, holds only when the intensity is equivalent to a harmony of qualitative feelings (aesthetic harmony), and not when it results from the experience of destruction. Harmony is a mixture of opposites: similarity and contrast, repetition and novelty, regularity and irregularity.[4]

In Wieman's theory the concept "appreciable activity" is basic. Value is that connection between activities which makes them appreciable. An activity is any change, physical, biological, psychological, social, which is so correlated with other changes as to form a coherent system. "Value, then, is that connection between appreciable activities which makes them mutually sustain-

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[1]John Dewey, Experience and Nature (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1925), p. 396.

[2]Dewey, The Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1929), p. 265.

[3]Samuel Alexander, Beauty and Other Forms of Value (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), p. 289.

[4]Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), and Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1933).

ing, mutually enhancing, mutually diversifying, and mutually meaningful."[1] Another principle is added: Meaning may transform "suffering into an experience which is positively appreciated." This five-fold principle represents the principle of value. Values are graded in terms of the connections. But the connections are potential as well as actual. Value is a "combination of actuality and possibility."[2] Human consciousness is implied in value, but may be only potential at any given moment in the existence of value. Growth of value is the work of God. Men may destroy it or provide conditions without which a given instance of growth could not occur. But the growth itself is, like any chemical process, never the work of man.[3]

Sorley posits value in transcendent Mind. Value satisfies desire, but is independent of this relation. Value cannot be reduced to existential propositions. It denotes that which "Ought-to-be."[4] It is imperative and normative. Values are both intrinsic and instrumental. The former attach to persons (moral values), the latter to things.[5] But only intrinsic values are real values, and only moral values are intrinsic. Moral values are absolute, eternal, universal, objective. The principle of value, upon which the moral human will is founded, is absolute, unconditional, and unchanging.[6] Moral values form an organic whole, the objective moral order, which is independent of man and separate from the order of sense-perception. Values are known through intuition.

Hartmann posits value in a supersensible realm.[7] Values are essences. They have ideal self-existence as distinct from real self-existence. The former is the realm of logic, the latter of things and events. Values subsist for themselves, unconditional,[8]

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[1]Henry N. Wieman, "Values: Primary Data for Religious Inquiry," The Journal of Religion, XVI (1936), 394.

[2]H. N. Wieman and R. W. Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1935), p. 51.

[3]Ibid., p. 52.

[4]William R. Sorley, Moral Values and the Idea of God (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 78.

[5]Ibid., pp. 117-18. [6]Ibid., p. 146.

[7]Nicolai Hartmann, Ethics, trans. S. Coit (New York: Macmillan Co., 1932), I, 183.

[8]Ibid., p. 226.

and absolute.[1] Value implies Ought, the Ought-to-be.[2] It is the content of the Ought.[3] Values are known through a priori feeling, or emotional intuition.[4] Value judgments are objective, necessary, and universal.[5]

Urban holds that value is ultimate and indefinable.[6] But it is neither being nor non-being; it neither exists nor subsists. It is a meaning to be acknowledged, not an entity to be pointed at.[7] It refers to Oughtness, but not in the sense that the other non-naturalistic concepts do. Rather it means "value-objective."[8] Urban's theory is so abstract that it tends to become meaningless. Because of this it is difficult to see what contribution it may have for the present discussion.

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[1] Ibid., p. 192. [2] Ibid., pp. 247-48.

[3] Ibid., p. 249. [4] Ibid., p. 100. [5] Ibid., p. 225.

[6] William M. Urban, The Intelligible World (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 139.

[7] Ibid., p. 146. [8] Ibid., p. 464.

CRITIQUE OF VALUE-THEORIES

Non-naturalism is rejected as an adequate theory of value of the following reasons: First, it creates artificial problems by postulating more than one order of existence, a natural and a non-natural. This type of world-view is speculative, undesirable, unnecessary, and without demonstration. It prevents complete integration of experience and of knowledge, and renders the objective world incomprehensible. The two orders have never been successfully related. Secondly, the relegating of value to a transcendent or supersensible realm removes it from the experience and system of meanings of the common man's life out of which the awareness of values seems to have arisen, and deposits it in the remote where it tends to become the exclusive property of the academic mind. That value belongs to the realm of logic, that is, of formal necessity, may be disproven by the fact that its denial does not create an absurdity or impossibility. Thirdly, the "ought" is as formal and contentless a concept as "value" unless referred to some existential and empirical property such as quality or relation. Furthermore, it may be affirmed that the ought arises out of the values that are discovered in practical and particular situations with as much evidence as that the knowledge of values arises out of the sense of the ought. Fourthly, intuition is not usually accepted as a medium of knowledge, while ideas acquired through intuitive or mystical insight are usually verified by other methods before being recognized as knowledge. Intuition is an exclusive method of knowledge, and is meaningless to minds who do not use it. Furthermore, it is an unreliable method. How can one be sure that his ideas are intuitive? Why do intuitive judgments of right and wrong differ and conflict as often occurs, if intuition provides absolute knowledge? And where intuition is affirmed to be infallible it opens the way to intolerance and bigotry. Intuition is also subjective and therefore relative, and involves the dangers implicit in subjective ways of knowing. Finally, intuition does not reveal to us a knowledge of a supersensible world in the sense that empiricism reveals to us a know-

ledge of the external natural world. There is overwhelming evidence of the objective natural world, but not of the supersensible. Natural objects have a way of compelling us to certain kinds of activity, and of forcing themselves upon us. This, however, does not hold for the world that is intuited as the non-natural. Fifthly, the absolute distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values is erroneous and pernicious, arising out of a false dichotomy of means and ends. Means and ends always intermingle, being relative to functions and purposes in situations; that is, the same object may be both a means and an end at the same moment, depending upon how it is used or upon its function. There is no knowledge of an ultimate end in a world of process confronted by a partially unknown future. By making man an intrinsic value and nature an instrumental, there follows a loss of community of feeling and oneness between human and non-human nature, which gives rise to the exploitation of nature and to egoism. Sixthly, the restriction of value to moral value is an arbitrary and unjustifiable interpretation, leading to a depreciation of non-moral values and their exploitation to the end of morality which has dangerous consequences. Seventhly, making morality a non-natural category is unnecessary. It complicates the general problems of value and of metaphysics. Finally, non-naturalistic theories are based upon a wish: the wish for security.

Naturalism is considered superior to non-naturalism because it avoids some of the major difficulties and some of the dangerous implications of non-naturalism. But what specific form of naturalistic theory of value is the most adequate?

Subjectivism is rejected because, first, affective theories are weak in that feelings of pleasure and happiness, though values, are specific values and are not the only or the highest values. Pleasure is not the only object of desire, nor is it always the object of desire, that it may be present in some degree in every desire. We desire other things than pleasure-feelings. Sometimes pain may be the object of desire. Finally, feeling fails to function as a guide to conduct, or as a principle of criticism. And it is one of the contentions of this thesis that a theory of value should provide a principle for making choices. Secondly, volitional theories are inadequate because the object of the will is not always one's own satisfaction. It may sometimes be the cause of one's activity, and is probably always an accompaniment of

value situations or a sign of value, at least on the human level. But the object of the will is usually objects, activities, situations, or persons. Furthermore, we often value things which we do not and cannot desire, though we may feel an interest in their existence. Thus, we value things we possess and things of the past. Thirdly, the motor-affective theory, as developed by Perry, is inadequate because: first, its principle of criticism in terms of "satisfaction" is not logically implied in the definition of value; secondly, inclusiveness of interest as the base for the "best" value, as if it were the only possible base, is inconsistent with the general thesis that interest confers value. According to the thesis, inclusiveness of interest would denote "best" value only if it were the object of interest. If it were not the object of interest, so far from denoting the best, it would not even denote good. This would be true of the Yoga philosophy in which the object of interest is the exclusion of interests, and in which inclusiveness of interest is the worst of evils. Thirdly, the notion of the satisfaction of all individuals which Perry adopts should be pressed a little further to the notion of that condition by virtue of which such satisfactions are made possible, that is, the notion of a certain correlation between activities. Fourthly, it is an exclusive definition in so far as interest implies cognition; that is, it excludes from the status of value those activities which do not happen to be the object of awareness, or of judgment (interest-judgment), such as functions of the body which are necessary to satisfaction or to inclusive harmony, but which may not be cognized at any given moment. It does seem that many activities are of value prior to their cognition by a subject, though, of course, they are not valued until they are cognized.

Other criticisms that apply to all subjectivist theories of value are: first, subjectivist theories imply vicious relativism. This is more apparent the more subjective feeling is emphasized. Perry tries to avoid this position by including the object within the value relation. Because of this his theory may be called "relational" to distinguish it from pure subjectivism. But his theory comes closer to the subjectivists than to the objectivists in that he admits "satisfaction" as a basic concept, and as a criteria for comparing values. Secondly, subjective theories assume that because feelings (pleasure, desire, interest) are always present when values are cognized they generate or con-

stitute value. It is apparent that these features must be present when values are cognized. How could values, which involve emotive experiences, be perceived otherwise? But it does not follow that value must be defined in such terms. Of course, one may so define value if he wishes, but he must be able to demonstrate that his definition is more adequate than any alternative. It is the contention of this thesis that this cannot be done. Thirdly, subjective theories imply a discontinuity of nature on the level of value; that is, there is a bifurcation between conscious nature and the rest of nature where value is restricted to the conscious level of activity. Discontinuity renders complete integration of personality and of experience impossible. Fourthly, subjective theories have psychological and sociological implications that may be dangerous. This is more apparent the more the emphasis is upon states of consciousness. Psychologically, it may encourage unhealthy introspection and egoism. Sociologically, its emphasis upon human values tends towards supreme devotion to something less than the totality of value, namely, devotion to the family, the club, the social circle, the State. But the object of supreme devotion should be an all inclusive value, and the highest. State worship leads to the dominance of technological instruments of power and necessity over love and freedom, that is, to materialism. Finally, a subjective theory is inadequate as a guide to conduct, or as a philosophical basis for ethics. It lacks objective and scientifically verifiable criteria for evaluating; it fails to provide that perspective necessary to the clarifying and appraising of finite values; it lacks sufficient grounds for the "ought."

The Neutralism of Dewey is rejected because: first, it is ambiguous and inconsistent. Dewey's concern is not the defining of value, but the ascertaining of a principle of criticism. Secondly, in so far as value is conditioned by judgment, or implies cognition, the theory implies a discontinuity in nature and opens itself to the charges made against subjectivism at this point.

Thirdly, Dewey fails to identify that character by virtue of which connections are of value, or with reference to which judgment conditions value. Alexander defines this character in terms of "Coherence." To this extent his theory is superior to Dewey's, and is more comparable to those of objective naturalism as developed by Whitehead and Wieman. We shall, therefore, consider his theory in comparison with the objective theories.

The remaining type of value-theory, objective naturalism, is believed to possess the most adequate solution to the problem of values. This is so because, on the negative side, it avoids the vicious relativism and the discontinuity of nature implicit in subjectivism, and the artificial problems and meaningless propositions involved in non-naturalism. On the positive side, it provides objective criteria for recognizing and grading values; it achieves a unification of nature by making human values merely a special instance of cosmic values, or values in general; the method by which it cognizes and judges values, the scientific method, is more reliable than other methods adopted by certain of the alternative theories.

Whitehead's theory of value in terms of objective feeling is strong in that it achieves a unified and coherent cosmology. In terms of the cosmology, it achieves an objective and naturalistic status for value; a concept of supreme or absolute value (cosmic love) in the perspective of which finite values may be more clearly defined and measured; and it does justice to "feeling" as constituting a part of the value situation, for value is an emotive concept. Finally, and this is most significant, value connotes an objective correlation of activities (feelings) which yields "satisfaction." This provides a necessary supplement to the subjective theories, and is carried through also by Wieman and Alexander. But Whitehead's theory may have to be abandoned in part because it implies his metaphysics. Thus, "feeling" apart from Whitehead's cosmology connotes subjectivism, and is misleading to those who either do not accept his usage of the term or who deny the metaphysics. In the second place, it is difficult to see how it can function as a principle of conduct, that is, as a satisfactory basis for ethics. "Feeling" does not lend itself to social validation, or co-operative grading.

Wieman's theory is superior to Whitehead's in that it makes "activity" the key-word rather than "feeling." Activity is objective, and lends itself better to observation, computation, and control. Practical problems are solved through activity. It is superior also in that it makes value inclusive of possibilities. Whitehead's theory seems to imply this, and succeeds in being inclusive in this way in so far as eternal objects are value potentials. But this is not emphasized. Finally, Wieman's emphasis upon the function of meaning and perspective in transforming appar-

ent evils into good is a further contribution, and a mark of superiority. Wieman's and Whitehead's theories are comparable in that each recognizes the place of feeling in the value situation. While feeling is basic in Whitehead, Wieman makes the connections between activities basic and the feeling an accompaniment or result of these when the activities are appreciable. The theories are comparable also in that while Whitehead's "aesthetic harmony" means a balance of similarity and contrast, repetition and novelty, regularity and irregularity, and is graded in value according to intensity of feeling, Wieman's notions of mutual support, mutual diversification, and mutual enhancement suggest the balance of activities as opposed to absolute rigidity or absolute irregularity (chaos). But Wieman's theory is inferior in that it implies a dichotomy between man and God with respect to "growth of value." God alone does the growing; man simply aids or hinders. But, according to Whitehead's cosmology, freedom and creativity are matters of degree. God merely possesses in supreme degree what man possesses in finite degree. Wieman's theory is also weak because of an ambiguity in use of words, and a seeming inconsistency in development of the argument. It is difficult to be certain whether value implies actual cognition or not; whether the five principles of value are to be identified with value or not. Finally, to the question of why relations of mutual support and enhancement between activities constitute value, Wieman's reply is because such relations yield "enjoyable activities." But precisely what is meant by enjoyable activities is never made clear. This, it seems, is the weakest feature of the theory, and prevents it from achieving a satisfactory solution to the problem of value.

Alexander's theory of value seems more consistent and convincing than the alternative theories within this group. It is strong because of its inclusiveness and because of the integration of nature which it achieves; it is strong also in its attempt at grading values from the tertiary down to the general. It is weak, however, in that it excludes value from those satisfactions which do not promote the type, or meet typical needs. This raises the question of what needs are typical and what not? What is to be the criteria for determining in practical situations which satisfactions are legitimate? Alexander is here not defining generic value; and it is our contention that generic value must be defined before a principle of values can be ascertained, that is, "better"

implies "good," and calls for a prior concept of good.

In conclusion, we propose to adopt a generic concept of value, and to define it in terms of a relationship between activities. "Activities" is used instead of the "subject-object" relation because the latter suggests only external relations, whereas in value-situations the relations may be both external and internal. Value, then, as we propose to define it, denotes a relationship of coherence between activities. This is a generic definition of value. It is more adequate than alternative theories in its implications for experience, existence, and ethics. Coherence is a necessary condition of every value situation: existence, life, consciousness, personality, society, experience, meaning, art, science, morality, love. One process in nature seems to be that of the continuous achieving of ever new and increasingly inclusive systems of coherence, each system seeking ever new harmonies with its environs. The life-processes of man seem to be a continuous quest for harmonious adjustments. Finally, coherence is a necessary condition of satisfaction, and of promotion of the type. Objects, events, persons, in themselves do not yield satisfaction. It is the way in which they are related, namely, the relationship of coherence, which does this. Hence, the relationship is the basic element in value. Incoherence always seems to be the condition of evil, and of the frustration of the type.

The problem of grading values in terms of "better" and "best" is as difficult as that of defining generic value. At some risk of oversimplification it is proposed that the principle of comparison be that of the inclusiveness of connections of coherence between activities. This inclusiveness is intended to take into account possible as well as actual connections. In this respect, then, the more inclusive the system the better the value, while incoherence would denote evil. Evil, according to this, would always be a conflict between systems of good. That is, evil is good against good. Evil is, therefore, relative to and dependent upon good. Evil is present where one system of good frustrates the growth of another, destroys another, prevents the birth or existence of another; or, when one system is less inclusive than is possible to it; when a system undergoes disintegration or destruction, especially before it has reached its maturity; or when two or more systems are mutually obstructive. This character of coherence and of incoherence represents the absolute character of

good and evil.

But good and evil also have a relative character. They are relative to individual needs and perspectives; that is, what is good from the point of view of one individual may be evil from the point of view of another. Also, what is good in one situation may be evil in another. Or, what is good from the point of view of a level of existence lower in the scale may be evil from the point of view of one higher in the scale. Similarly, knowledge of good and evil is always probable and relative, as is the knowledge of any thing else. This is so because of the nature of existence as being finite, selective, indeterminate, dynamic; because of the imperfection of our techniques of observation and inference; and because of the nature of scientific knowledge as being that of abstraction and exclusion. But the relativity is saved from the charge of viciousness by the nature of the principle of value as being objective and observable.

This value-theory is fortunate not only from a metaphysical point-of-view, but also from a psychological. By turning the attention outwards and away from the self, and by encouraging activity, it holds the key to happiness and to a more complete integration of personality and experience than is possible in any of the alternative theories. It is further believed that it succeeds in securing and validating a philosophical foundation for religious living which, though not final or completely satisfactory, is more adequate than alternative theories provide.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LIVING

Value-theory constitutes the philosophic foundation of ethics. An ethic founded upon this theory must be naturalistic, relativistic, activistic, predictive, and synthetic. Value-theory is also basic to idea of God. A concept of God consonant with our theory of value cannot be either supernaturalistic or monistic. Like ethics, it must be naturalistic. Theistic naturalism as developed by either Whitehead or Wieman is most in agreement with the view of value as objective and naturalistic. A minimum definition of God may be formulated thus: God is that in nature which makes for, or the tendency in nature towards, the actualizing of more inclusive internally coherent systems of activities.

"Man" is also a naturalistic concept, being a special kind of cosmic activity, differing from other activities only in degree. But this degree makes him capable of assisting or obstructing the growth of value more than is possible to any other form of activity. Also, because of his high degree of freedom, intelligence, imagination, foresight, and memory, man is the subject of profound internal conflict--a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious, between egoism and altruism, between the finite and infinite. As a result, he experiences a sense of sin and a need for salvation, that is, a feeling of having knowingly increased the actuality of evil or prevented the growth of good, and a desire to be reinstated in harmony with that in nature which makes for the growth of good--God.

The ultimate object of this thesis was to discover and validate a sound philosophical foundation for religious living. It was believed that this consisted in a theory of value. This was the justification for a critique of theories of good and evil, and it is believed that the study has been successful. The theory of value adopted in this thesis is believed to be more adequate than alternative theories because, first, it achieves by implication a more unified concept of nature; secondly, it is more in accord with experience of good and evil; thirdly, it provides a foundation for an ethic that may function as a practical guide to

reflective conduct; fourthly, it provides a philosophic basis for a concept of God that is metaphysically valid and is worthy of religious devotion.